

Assembly Bill No. 148

CHAPTER 124

An act to amend Sections 2940 and 2942 of the Fish and Game Code, relating to the Salton Sea.

[Approved by Governor July 16, 2014. Filed with
Secretary of State July 16, 2014.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 148, V. Manuel Pérez. Salton Sea restoration.

(1) Existing law requires the Secretary of the Natural Resources Agency, in consultation and coordination with the Salton Sea Authority, to lead Salton Sea restoration efforts. Existing law requires the secretary and the Legislature to maintain full authority and responsibility for any state obligation under a specified Quantification Settlement Agreement. Existing law requires the secretary and the Legislature to have final approval for any proposed restoration plan.

This bill would revise language stating legislative intent regarding restoring the Salton Sea. The bill would eliminate the requirement that the secretary and the Legislature have final approval for any proposed restoration plan. The bill would recast the requirement that the secretary and the Legislature maintain full authority and responsibility for any state obligation under the Quantification Settlement Agreement to instead provide that specified provisions of law do not alter any state responsibility under the Quantification Settlement Agreement or the state's authority to carry out that responsibility.

(2) Existing law authorizes the Salton Sea Authority to lead a restoration funding and feasibility study, in consultation with the Natural Resources Agency, as prescribed.

This bill would instead authorize the authority to lead a feasibility study, in coordination and under contract with the Secretary of the Natural Resources Agency, as prescribed.

(3) Existing law prohibits an evaluation, study, review, or other activity undertaken pursuant to specified provisions of law from delaying the planning and implementation of ongoing and planned mitigation projects, including, but not limited to, the Salton Sea Species Conservation Habitat Project or other mitigation measures pursuant to existing state and federal programs and agreements.

This bill would also prohibit an evaluation, study, review, or other activity undertaken pursuant to those provisions of law from delaying the planning and implementation of ongoing and planned restoration projects.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 2940 of the Fish and Game Code is amended to read:

2940. The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(a) The Salton Sea is California's largest inland water body with beneficial uses that include fisheries and wildlife habitat and preservation of endangered species, and is a repository for agricultural drainage.

(b) The Salton Sea ecosystem is a critical link on the international Pacific Flyway and supports over 400 species of birds.

(c) The Salton Sea is threatened by increasing salinity and reduced inflows. These changes increasingly threaten the unparalleled wildlife resources at the sea, as well as air quality in the region.

(d) In cooperation with local governments, nonprofit organizations, private businesses, and the public, the Salton Sea Authority can help protect wildlife habitats and endangered species, improve water and air quality, and enhance recreational opportunities in the region.

(e) In restoring the Salton Sea, it is the intent of the Legislature to do all of the following:

(1) Protect and provide long-term conservation of fish and wildlife that are dependent on the Salton Sea ecosystem.

(2) Restore the long-term stable aquatic and shoreline habitat for fish and wildlife that depend on the Salton Sea.

(3) Mitigate air quality impacts from restoration projects using the best available technology or best available control measures, as determined by the South Coast Air Quality Management District and the Imperial County Air Pollution Control District.

(4) Protect water quality.

(5) Maintain the Salton Sea as a vital link along the Pacific Flyway.

(6) Preserve local tribal heritage and cultural values associated with the Salton Sea.

(7) Minimize noxious odors and other water and air quality problems.

(8) Coordinate with local, state, and federal agencies that are responsible for air quality, endangered species, and other environmental mitigation implementation requirements of the Quantification Settlement Agreement.

(9) Enhance economic development opportunities that will provide sustainable financial improvements benefiting the local environment and the economic quality of life for communities around the Salton Sea.

SEC. 2. Section 2942 of the Fish and Game Code is amended to read:

2942. (a) (1) The secretary, in consultation and coordination with the authority, shall lead the Salton Sea restoration efforts that shall include all of the following:

(A) Early start habitat demonstration projects.

(B) Biological investigations relating to the restoration of the Salton Sea.

(C) Investigations of water quality, sedimentation, and inflows relating to the restoration of the Salton Sea.

(D) Air quality investigations, in consultation and coordination with local and regional air quality agencies, relating to the restoration of the Salton Sea.

(E) Geotechnical investigations relating to the restoration of the Salton Sea.

(F) Financial assistance grant programs to support restoration activities of local stakeholders.

(2) Nothing in this article shall alter any state responsibility under the Quantification Settlement Agreement or the state's authority to carry out any responsibility under the Quantification Settlement Agreement.

(3) (A) To the extent that funding is appropriated to the department for Salton Sea restoration activities, the Department of Water Resources, in coordination and under agreement with the department, may undertake restoration efforts identified in this subdivision.

(B) The department and the Department of Water Resources shall do all of the following for the Salton Sea Species Conservation Habitat Project:

(i) Immediately make available relevant information relating to the factors that influence the cost and size of the alternatives discussed in the environmental impact report or environmental impact statement for the species habitat conservation program.

(ii) Release all available detail on a final project design immediately, or upon final determination of a least environmentally damaging preferred alternative by the United States Army Corps of Engineers. Details of a final project design shall include location, configuration, size, and cost.

(iii) Immediately make available project evaluation protocols that include the following principles of adaptive management:

(I) Goals and objectives of the project.

(II) The project design and an operations plan.

(III) A monitoring plan that will include metrics that identify benefits to the species.

(IV) A performance evaluation based on species population identified through monitoring.

(V) A decisionmaking framework to evaluate project performance and guide operations and management changes.

(b) (1) The authority may lead a feasibility study, in coordination and under contract with the secretary, to do the following:

(A) Investigate access and utility agreements that may contribute to the future funding of restoration activities at the Salton Sea.

(B) Analyze all feasible funding sources for restoration program components and activities.

(C) Analyze economic development opportunities, including, but not limited to, renewable energy, biofuels, mineral development, and algae production for the purposes of identifying new revenue sources for the Salton Sea restoration efforts.

(D) Identify state procurement and royalty sharing opportunities.

(E) Review existing long-term plans for restoration of the Salton Sea and recommend to the secretary changes to existing restoration plans. In

any review pursuant to this subparagraph, the authority shall consider the impacts of the restoration plan on air quality, fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, and the technical and financial feasibility of the restoration plan and shall consider the impacts on other agencies responsible for air quality, endangered species, and other environmental mitigation requirements for implementation of the Quantification Settlement Agreement.

(2) No evaluation, study, review, or other activity pursuant to this article shall delay the planning and implementation of ongoing and planned restoration or mitigation projects, including, but not limited to, the Salton Sea Species Conservation Habitat Project or other measures pursuant to existing state and federal programs and agreements.